

Time of Grace Ministry
Now Is the Time: Look!
Revelations 21:22-26
October 8, 2017

Pastor Jeremy Mattek

Hello, I'm Pastor Jeremy Mattek for Time of Grace. My family and I have lived in our current home for almost ten years now but two weeks after we moved in our house was broken into; many of you have had that same experience. We walked in through the garage door and we noticed that the TV was missing. It took us a few seconds to realize what was going on but then it clicked. And we looked around the house to see that pretty much every electronic that we owned is now gone. We lost a lot that day, including a lot of pictures from the youngest days of my youngest daughter's existence; we'll never get those back again.

Yeah, the experience made us feel - well, it made us feel vulnerable; it made us feel unsafe. And not just that day, but for many days after that. One of my sons had trouble sleeping for months. One of my other children will climb into bed with us regularly for a long time after that because they didn't quite feel safe in their own home.

There are a lot of things in life that can make you feel that way; that can make you feel vulnerable, that can make you feel safe, unsafe, that can make you feel unsettled. Today, on Time of Grace, Pastor Jeske will share with us a message of great comfort in which he directs us to one place where we can look to know through all the ups and downs of life that you really are going to be okay.

Pastor Mark Jeske

We live in a very insecure and threatening world. And you can run but you can't hide. I was sitting in some member's living room about a week ago and they were telling me about their beautiful home, how much they love living there, but it took them a little to get over the experience of the second week in their new home. Their house was robbed; somebody totally went through their house and just trashed it. How does that not completely unbalance your sense of feeling safe? When your sanctuary from the world gets violated like that?

I feel it's the unique nature of the place where I happen to live that we have to park on the street and my car, unfortunately – fortunately, and unfortunately – has electronic doors, you know, which is kind of cool because you can, you can, like do the click thing and it's all unlocked when you walk up or you can just touch it and if you've got the transmitter key in your pocket, you can just touch the door and it opens up. But somebody else apparently goes up and down the street and has figured out a way – and maybe they've got some kind of electronic skeleton key. My car has been gone through at least four times. How does that not make you feel kind of unsafe, right?

Now, I don't have anything left of any value. Thankfully, whoever went through despised my taste in music so after the first two times, I took my CDs out of there and brought them in so I can't leave anything; I don't have anything in the car. They even took a dead chainsaw that was in the trunk. Good luck with that.

I'm telling you this, not to creep you out; I'm just simply describing your life. If we went through everybody here and you told your stories of having been threatened, abused, robbed, looted, or somebody messed with you or your stuff, we would have a tale of woe that would run to 100 pages, wouldn't we? All of us have been touched by agents of Satan who have no respect for you or your stuff and their appetite for personal aggrandizement simply leads them to take advantage of their fellow human beings as though they were just things. It's a way of treating people not with the dignity of God's splendid creations, but looking at people as a thing. You got something I want; I'll step on you to get what I want. That's the world we live in.

And sometimes, aren't you sick of it? Don't you long for a more secure place to live? Where people aren't going to mess with you anymore? But as you're pondering that, I'll tell you one thing I long for even more: That I won't hurt anybody else, either. Because in my more honest moments, I realize that in my own way, I have added to the fear and insecurity of people in the world; people that I have said things to that made them anxious or doubtful. And I not only don't want other people to hurt me anymore, but I also long for the day when I will be pure – not just pure in talk – but pure in actions, too. I long to be pure and secure. Do you long for that, too?

God has a great plan for you and for me and it's laid out for us frequently in Scripture and I'd like to invite you to read one paragraph with me this morning that is going to lift up your spirits to know what you're heading for; that you can indeed be respectful and, even to a degree, fearful of the great Day of Judgment coming. We should fear the wrath of God. He does mean his commandments. He is coming to judge the entire world.

But hanging on to what your Savior Jesus bought you takes away your fear for he has already absorbed in his wonderful body the punishments headed for you and instead, through your faith, he puts his holiness on you so that God has only smiles for you. And you will pass through the judgment. In fact, you've already been declared not guilty. You've been pre-acquitted of that great trial. Hang onto that faith and what you are heading for is what is going to be described for us in the second last chapter of the Bible.

I'd like to invite you to take a Bible nearby and open it up to the second last chapter, Revelation 21, and look at the last paragraph of that chapter. Revelation was written by John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. He rather modestly gave himself that descriptor. Does that sound a little cheeky to you? Would you like it if one of your sisters or brothers said, "I'm the child that mama loves?" You'd say, "Shut up." "Mama loves me, too."

I can't explain why John picked that particular term; there must be something to it. I'm not sure what. But there was an unusual emotional bond between John and his Savior Jesus. And you know that bond, I think, got even more intense. John lived the longest of all the apostles. The

rest of them were killed for their faith and his brother was the first to go. His brother, James, was the first of the apostle martyrs; he was killed for his faith before his ministry hardly even had a chance to get started. One of the Herod's put him to death. He had to go around his entire life with that dread in his heart: "What if I'm next? My brother was killed for his faith," but it did not slow him down. In fact, now writing the book of Revelation in his nineties, he's a geezer; he didn't want to retire. He wanted to be back at work but he was not free to move about the country. Do you know where John was when he received the visions that led to the book of Revelation? He was in a penal colony; a prison island like Guantanamo Bay. You know, where America puts its most dangerous international captives that are too dangerous even to be brought into the U.S. They are put in a special military prison in what the Marines call, "Gitmo Bay." This was a prison island called Patmos. Thankfully, he wasn't killed, but he looked across the salt water to where he really wanted to be – the city of Ephesus – which was his field of pastoral responsibility. And even into his nineties, wanted to get back to work; the word "retire" was not in his vocabulary, apparently. And even though he was a prisoner on that island, he somehow was granted access to pen and ink and papyrus and he also was given access by God, who cracked open the skies and let him peek into, first of all, what's really going on behind the scenes. And the middle chapters of Revelation are a horrible nightmare of terrible visions of destruction, illness, plague, famine, and warfare and slaughter and the forces of good and evil in massive collision. The forces of Satan seem to be overwhelming the few believers on the earth. But then God lets the readers of this book see a happy ending and here are some of the most beautiful words in that happy ending.

After our time of struggle, after our time of personal sin, you and I are going to be given true purity. Not only reputational purity, but actually, you will be de-fanged; the sin in you will completely be de-fanged and, somehow, surgically removed from you by God. And you will also be able to live in complete security. Right now, it's only a promise. We live by faith but man, it just is like talk right now because it doesn't seem like the reality, does it? "You have a prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies." You think, "Yeah, that sounds about right. I live, I walk, every day amongst my enemies. But in the Psalm, it says, "in security and in safety." In other words, my enemies cannot lay a glove on me anymore. That, for now, is a promise. Here is the reality. So by now, I hope you found that spot; let's take a look at it.

In some ways, the beauty of heaven can best be described about what it isn't – not only what it's going to be – but also what it wasn't. Let's take a look. Verse 22 – this elderly man is allowed to peek ahead and see what awaits us. He said, "I didn't see a temple in the city," which is kind of funny. The greatest characteristic of the city of Jerusalem, which is a metaphor for heaven, was the beautiful temple that Solomon built, right in the middle of it. John says there won't be any church buildings in heaven. In fact, there won't be pastors either; I'll be out of work. Some of you will have work; I will not. I will have to go back to some of my old skills, probably back in the restaurant trade, and I'm mighty happy to do it. Come eat at my restaurant where I'm working; I hope you will be a waiter, maybe, or maybe a busboy like I was back in the day.

But we won't have church buildings because heaven is one gigantic church. The "Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Almighty, Pantokrator, in Greek means, "Can do anything he wants." And the word "Lamb," simultaneously is the meekest and gentlest of all the

animals. It's a reminder every time the Scripture says, "Lamb" with a capital L, the Lamb of God. Do you know what it's saying? That Jesus made himself small and made himself a victim and allowed himself to be bled out to death so that he could give you life. Whenever you see the phrase, "Lamb of God," just say, "You take away the sin of the world," which means since I'm in the world, you take away the sin of me. When you see the word "Lamb," just think of the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus, the High Priest, essentially sacrificed himself so that you and I would not have to endure what he endured so that the wrath of God was put on him, not on us. So that the judgment and condemnation of God was put on him and not on us. So that hell and damnation were put on him and not on us. And sacrifices always bring about a giant switcheroo and the substitute stepped in for you and gave you his place and the Lamb is there to welcome you home to his house.

The reason you don't need churches or even a gigantic building is because God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. Everybody in heaven – we won't have to wait in line to talk to God. You will have immediate communication with God forever and you're going to love every minute of it. You will be pure and secure. "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." Now here is a little code word that avid readers of the Old Testament would have picked up right away. That word, "glory," means heavenly brightness. The unusual presence of God with like radiation of golden beams coming out of somebody's face or bright lights of fire in the Old Testament were called the glory of the Lord. Whenever God was up to something really big, he would arrange that there would be a burst of this golden light or often in terms of a fire, a smoking fire pot, or as in the case of the Israelites marching out of Egypt, a gigantic pillar of fire that protected them from the chariot troops of the Egyptians. But then it would go away.

Jesus was transfigured in front of Peter, James and John; James, soon to be dead. He glowed as he really was but then he turned it off and the glory went away. Abraham saw the fire of the Lord briefly but then it went away. Moses went up on Mount Sinai to receive the giving of the old covenant. The glory up there was so intense, his face glowed like he got radioactive with holiness. But it went away; it was temporary. And it's not as though God is now here saying there will not be any more sun and moon and planets and stars in his new universe that he's going to create out of the wreckage of the old one when he's done purifying and destroying everything. This isn't saying necessarily there will be no warm sun in the air or no moon by night. What it's saying is you won't need it because the glory is never again going to go away. The security and the love and the blessings pouring out from God will never cease. The glow, the beautiful light emanating from God, the friendly light – not the fire that burns and destroys – but the friendly light, like a nightlight, will let you know you're good. He's here. That light will never go away and you're going to love it.

"The nations will walk by its light. The kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it." In other words, no matter how much wealth people have accumulated on earth or how much power the kings of the earth have brought, there is simply going to be in a place far greater and grander than anything they've ever amassed, and they're going to be mighty glad. If they're believers, they're going to be mighty glad to be in there with us. And the glory and honor and wealth of heaven will be far greater than any little earthly amounts they've been able to pile up.

“On no day will its gates ever be shut for there will be no night.” And it’s not as though there can’t ever be darkness. There’s beauty at night too, isn’t there, if you look up and see the starry skies? The stars in the sky have launched a thousand poems and a thousand paintings. The point is that night is a scary time because that’s when Satan’s agents are most inspired to do their dirty deeds. And that fear that you feel will never again grip your heart. The gates won’t ever be shut. The door won’t ever be bolted because you and I won’t need locks anymore. You will never be afraid of anything again. You can barely even wrap your mind around that thought, can you? Never to fear another human being. Never to fear violence or human cruelty or people stepping on you or taking advantage of you, hurting you in any way. Doors will be irrelevant. The gates of the city – a city in ancient times, a city only had security when the gates were bolted at night and there was no more business or travel at night. If you didn’t get there in time, you would have to spend the night sleeping under the stars. The only way you got in is if you got in before the gates were shut. That’s how they protected themselves against raiders. And this is a metaphor for the fact that in heaven you will be completely secure. Don’t you long to be secure? I really do.

“Nothing impure will ever enter it nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Nothing impure will enter it, including you and me. This is the part that I’m most looking forward to. I will be cleansed and you will, too. Right now, you and I are cleansed as far as our reputation goes; legally, we’re cleansed. But in actuality, we still sin. Won’t you be glad when you are finally enabled fully to stop sinning once and for all? And never again tell a lie? Never again hurt somebody else? Never again cheat on a spouse? Never again ignore or insult God or contradict some of his word or pander – let the Satan pander to your desires and you cave in and do something evil? Aren’t you longing for the day when you will finally really be clean outside and in? I long for that day for I not only resent how other people hurt me, but I’m ashamed of hurt that I, myself, may have given to some others and maybe there even are people in this room today that I have hurt. I don’t want to ever do that again. But until that moment, I know that I still have those seeds of evil within me and have to work really hard to control the appetites and desires that lurk within me. And I don’t think I’m alone knowing that there’s a beast within. The beast lives within you, too, as long as you have that old sinful nature. And I am going to be so glad to be rid of it but I am promised that nothing impure will step onto those golden streets. And so, that means that God is not only going to change my prison record to having never sinned, but in actuality, my mind and heart will be as clean and pure as Jesus Christ and I can’t wait for that day.

Right now, the Scripture says, “Our lives are hidden in Christ.” All of these are wonderful ideas but you can’t see them. I will – I long for pure and secure but right now, I have to live in dirt and fear. But my heart in faith believes that this is my destiny and yours, too. Don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid to go forward. Don’t be afraid of the dying process because that only means you’re getting really close to hitting the jackpot. Don’t be afraid if aging is stealing your mobility and your once beautiful skin gets wrinkly and the hair on your head betrays you and changes colors or falls out. Don’t chafe and rage at the aging process for it only means you’re that many steps closer to pure and secure. It’s waiting for you. It’s been guaranteed for you by our Lord Jesus, himself.

You and I have the great honor and blessing and benefit of absorbing this hope for ourselves so we can live without fear but also, to share this message with other impure and fearful people around us. The Bible says that the Satan really controls the world. In many ways, you know, we say that God controls the world but 1 John 5 says that the devil – the whole world is under the control of the evil one, it says in chapter five. That seems like a paradox but we live in a world where Satan can do a lot of damage and a lot of harm. And the worst harm he could do is make you be afraid and to give up or to think that this being a Christian brings you nothing. The opposite is the truth: It brings you everything. Don't be fooled by what your eyes can see. Let the eyes of your heart believe these splendid words; that all the things you most hate about your life right now will be taken from you; never again to bother and harm you. And all the things you most love about this life – the people, the love that you receive – you can take with you. I long for pure and secure. And my greatest desire would be to share it with every one of you and it's ours through the blood of Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Jeremy Mattek

People sometimes ask, "What will heaven be like?" And when they ask, I think they're often asking what will heaven look like? The Bible gives some picturesque descriptions of heaven - the streets of gold, the crystal sea - but those are just word pictures meant to evoke different feelings of peace and serenity. Really, when the Bible describes what heaven is like, it doesn't really describe what heaven will look like. Rather, it more often describes how you will feel in heaven.

Today, Pastor Jeske was in Revelation 21 and if you back up a couple of verses from where he was talking, there was a beautiful description of how you will feel in heaven. Where it says, "In heaven, there will be no more death. No more mourning, deep crying. No more crying and no more pain." Can you imagine a life where none of those things happen? Can you imagine a life where you don't have to feel the effects of them? That's heaven.

A friend of mine, his father was dying and he was meeting with the doctor and the doctor was saying - was giving him some news. He said, "Well, you know, we've done all that we can for your dad but, of course, God can do more if he chooses to." And he said, "There are really only two ways that this is going to turn out. Either God is going to make your dad better or God is going to make your dad perfect." He was talking about heaven; the heaven that you and I get to look forward to.

Let's pray together.

Dear Father in Heaven, we thank you for the beautiful description of what is waiting for us who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; the beautiful description of heaven. Pure perfection that we get to look forward to. That is not earth. Earth is full of hurt; earth is full of a lot of pain. As we go through earth, our hearts are filled with a lot of guilt and a lot of shame. We thank you for the comfort you give us as we walk through life on earth; covering over our sins with your forgiveness, giving us the comfort of your wonderful promises that we are never

alone, that God himself is with us every step of the way. We thank you for the blessed assurance of what is waiting for us; a time when there is no more death, no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain. What a beautiful gift you have given us in the life and death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus. As we travel, as we journey through the ups and downs and the twists and turns of this life, keep us close to him as he always remains close to us. That our hearts are always comforted and strengthened with all that he is, with all that he has done, and with all that is waiting for us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

I'm Pastor Jeremy Mattek for Time of Grace and it all starts now.